

*Declaration of the Convention of "Radical Political Abolitionists," at Syracuse, June 26th, 27th, and 28th, 1855.*

We believe slaveholding to be an unsurpassed crime; and we hold it to be the sacred duty of civil government to *suppress* crime. We conceive slaveholding to be the annihilation of human rights, and we hold it to be the grand end and mission of civil government to *protect* human rights; nay, more, we hold that the government which annihilates, instead of protecting human rights, should be known not as civil government, but only as a conspiracy—an usurpation.

We accordingly declare and maintain that there can be no legitimate civil government, rightfully claiming support and allegiance as such, that is not authorized, nay, that is not morally and politically bound, to prohibit and to suppress slaveholding. The responsibilities of civil government in this country rest, primarily, upon the people, by whom their own forms of government are instituted, and who, at the ballot-box, provide for their administration in conformity with their wishes.

If the Federal Government, by the Constitution, is incompetent to this task, then it is incompetent to be a civil government at all, or to secure the objects set forth in the Constitution itself. It can neither "form a more perfect union," nor "establish justice," nor "insure domestic tranquillity," nor "provide for the common defense," nor "promote the general welfare," nor "secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity."

But we deny that our fathers ever attempted such an absurdity as that of instituting a civil government without power to protect the natural rights of its subjects—a government "to establish justice," and "secure the blessings of liberty," without powers adequate to the suppression of slaveholding. We challenge the proof that when they declared it self-evident that all men are created equal, they intended a portion of them to be slaves; that when they were publicly proclaiming inalienable rights, they were secretly plotting unparalleled wrongs; that when they "appealed to the Supreme Judge of the

world for the rectitude of their intentions," they were acting the part of base hypocrites; that when they proposed "to establish justice," they bound themselves to support the grossest injustice; that under pretense of securing the blessings of liberty, they entered into a compact for the support of slavery! Their language in the Constitution indicates nothing of the kind, but the opposite; and there is no proof that their intentions were in conflict with their language. We deem it, therefore, right and proper to construe the Constitution as it *reads*, and not as the slaveholders pretend that it *means*. And, by such a construction, the Constitution requires the Federal Government to abolish slavery in all the States.

More than all this, we maintain that if it could be proved (as it can not be) that our fathers mentally intended to protect slavery, while their words, in the Constitution, required its suppression, we should still hold ourselves at liberty, and under obligations, to use the Constitution according to its *righteous language*, and against their *unrighteous intentions*. If men use language for dishonest purposes, and with dishonest intentions, it becomes the duty of honest men who may succeed them, and to whom their written instruments are committed, to defeat such dishonest purposes and intentions, if they can, by interpreting the language according to its natural and just meaning. Every enlightened and upright jurist will thus decide; and the decision commits to the Federal Government a Constitution that binds it to suppress slavery.

We deny that the Constitution could have contained any valid recognition of slavery, because there was never any legalized slavery in this country to be the *subject* of such recognition. We deny that slavery *can be* legalized by any conceivable process whatever. And, aside from this, we affirm that, according to the rules and maxims, even of slaveholding jurisprudence, and of the Supreme Court of the United States, there *never has been* any legalized slavery in this country. On this point, we are ready to produce abundant testimony from eminent slaveholding jurists and statesmen themselves. And the whole history of slavery and the slave

trade proves the statement to be truthful.

We affirm that the general structure of the Federal Constitution, as well as its particular provisions, preclude the legal existence of slavery, forbid the States to maintain it, provide for the liberation of the enslaved, and authorize and require, at the hands of the Federal Government, its suppression. The powers conferred on the Federal Government by the Constitution are amply adequate to this object. And we deny that the exercise of those powers for the suppression of slavery, would be any infringement of Constitutional State Rights, or of any of the "reserved rights" of the States or of the people.

With these views of the Constitution of our country, we feel ourselves prepared for an aggressive, not a merely defensive, contest with the slave power. We take our position accordingly, and ask our fellow-citizens to do the same. We sue for no needless amendments of the Constitution, requiring the concurrence of three fourths of the States. Properly construed, it already gives us all we need. We attempt no dissolution of the Union. The Constitution makes no provision for it, and nothing short of a revolution could effectuate it. We consent to no dissolution that would leave the slave in his chains. We demand the Constitutional deliverance of the slave, and of the whole country, North and South—a deliverance by the peaceful ballot-box, and within the power of the non-slaveholders of the United States. We seek not to amuse, to console, or to delude ourselves, or others, with mere idle efforts to prevent the further extension of slavery, while admitting its Constitutional right to *continue where it exists*. We will consent to no compromise with the deceiver that keeps no faith with its dupes—no compromise with pollution and crime. We yield not one inch, for one moment, nor on any conditions, to the control of the demon, over any portion of our country, or over a single human being over whom floats our national flag. We are Americans, knowing no North and no South; no slaves and no slave States. We are not only Americans, but men, and demand that, irrespective of race or complexion, all men shall be free.

Believing, as we firmly do, that the time to maintain, to fortify, and to render effective this high and commanding ground, has fully come, and that the occupancy of any lower ground would invite further aggressions, and insure final defeat, we resolutely take our stand on the platform already defined. Our political activities must meet the

demands of our convictions. We can consent to nothing less.

With our ideas of the nature of civil government, of our Constitutional powers, of our corresponding responsibilities as republican citizens; with our views of the common brotherhood of the human race, and of the equal rights of our fellow-countrymen in bonds, the position we have here taken rises high above any mere calculations of expedients, of availabilities, or of exigencies, however pressing and portentous. The ground we occupy is, to us, HOLY ground; the ground of the TRUE and of the RIGHT; the ground marked out by the instincts of our moral natures; by our relations to our fellow-men; by our allegiance to the common FATHER OF ALL; by the divine law of loving our neighbor as ourselves. We feel that our prayers to Heaven for the security of our liberties, for the liberties of the non-slaveholding States, or of any portion of our free territory, would be impious and offensive to a just God, the impartial parent of all men, if, in the act of offering such prayers, and of putting forth our own efforts to that end, we should consent to leave any portion of our fellow-countrymen in bondage, entitled as they are, by the organic and supreme law of the land, to the same freedom and protection with ourselves. The moral government of God over the nations, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and as illustrated in the page of universal history, forbids us to cherish any expectation of securing permanently *our own* liberties, or the liberties of *any portion* of the nation to which we belong, by any process short of securing the liberties of each and of all.

The foundation principles of civil government, and of civil law, confirm us in the same belief. The past and passing history of our own country, and of the pending struggle between despotism and freedom, testifies to the same truth, and assures us that there is no rational ground to expect the deliverance of our country, but by a strict adherence to the great principles upon which our measures are founded. To those principles and measures we cling, as to the sheet-anchor of American liberty; and we call on all the friends of humanity, of the slave, of free institutions, of pure religion, and of our common country, to come up to the rescue, and cast in their lot with us, in this great struggle. "Sink or swim, survive or perish," we are resolved to go forward. Our panoply is the TRUTH. Our confidence is in HIM who is the refuge of the oppressed, and in whose hands are the destinies of all.